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Something to Mull Over

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Former Living Force Plot Director Morrie Mullins presents the latest in our series of supplements to the campaign's newest scenarios. In "Something to Mull Over," we meet the cochlera, a mysterious and beautiful creature of the gas giant Genarius. This supplement ties into the April Living Force scenario, Open Arms, the second part of the "Metatheran Caution" trilogy.

I saw them first as we entered the upper atmosphere of Genarius. I thought that they were a distant radiation storm of some kind and almost steered away, but something caught my eye. The colors -- they were all wrong for a radiation storm. The clouds themselves, a swirling mix of orange and blue, seemed to spark with pink and violet, though the "sparks," as I first named them, were much too smooth. It was like watching electricity move in a perfect arc between two poles, a curve so gentle and subtle that, from a distance, it was easy to see it as a spark. But the flashes of color, splashes of intensity amidst the clouds, came toward me. That was the first time I saw a mull of cochlera.

Generally, there are between thirty and fifty of these things in a mull. They glide through the clouds, taking in the gases, processing them, and blinking pink and violet and white. If you've never seen them, it's almost impossible to describe, but I suppose I'll do what I can.

Up close, they're actually fairly disgusting. In a beautiful way, I guess. Their upper bodies are clear globular sacs, filled with a roiling fluid where the brilliant energy arcs back and forth. Their flesh -- such as it is -- seems pliable, and their bodies change shape as the currents in the clouds shift, twisting the creatures in impossible directions. Each of the cochlera has a half-dozen long appendages, each between three and twenty meters in length, though oddly enough, the size of the bodies doesn't vary markedly, only the length of the appendages. I'm not sure I'd call them tentacles, since that always implied (to me, at least) that they might be used for something. I've never seen a cochlera use those droopy limbs, so I've come to think of them as pseudopods, and if some xenobiologist wants to come out and take a look and tell the universe what they really are, well, that's fine.

It's a lot like watching a floating sack of goo with six long, gooey trails behind it. But the way the skin shifts makes it look like the gases are sliding over it and reacting with something on the inside -- which I suppose they probably are -- and the movement of the pseudopods is almost hypnotic. Those moments when something inside them shifts and you get the arcs of color are worth watching, and when you're watching them for what's going on inside,

instead of paying attention to what they look like on the surface, it's hard to look away.

If you're ever in Cularin, these creatures are a sight. I've never come across anything like them in the galaxy. JB says, check them out.

- - from the travel log of Jaan Bluum The gas giant Genarius.

The cochlera are a species of creature found only in the clouds of Genarius. They float on the currents present in the gases, traveling in loose associations referred to as "mulls." There is some speculation as to the relationship among the creatures that make up a mull of cochlera, but their physiology makes discussions of families - - as we know them - - somewhat difficult.

Cochlera reproduce by splitting themselves into two identical pieces. While speculation remains rampant as to what triggers the splitting of one creature into two, a number of conditions must exist for the fissioning to occur. First, the cochlera must be near a pocket of heavy beskium. Given that this is not one of the gases the creatures use for their nourishment, it is unclear why this gas is necessary, but there has never been a reported case of cochlera reproduction in the absence of the beskium.

Further, there must be other cochlera nearby. The fissioning is never done in isolation from a mull, and in fact, a cochlera that comes in contact with heavy beskium without at least a half-dozen others of its species nearby will simply swell up, becoming larger and larger until it eventually bursts. This has led some xenobiologists to speculate that the cochlera may actually release chemicals into the atmosphere of Genarius that enable others to split and create more of their kind. If so, this means that the creatures are not as amoebic as may first be perceived, at least as regards their reproductive activity. Unfortunately, researchers have never been able to get close enough to fissioning cochlera to obtain atmospheric samples that might help them determine what (if anything) may have been released by the remainder of the mull as a creature divided itself to create new life. The "Metatheran Caution" Trilogy Summary The Metatheran Cartel has never been particularly popular with many of the people of Cularin, and things only get worse when a strange new illness arises that has strong links back to the Cartel. Are the heroes willing to trace the problem back to its core - wherever that may take them?

A final condition that must be met in order for the cochlera to reproduce is that Genarius itself must be experiencing fierce storms near its core. While this is not altogether uncommon, there are lulls, times when the storms become much less intense. During those times, the mortality rate among the cochlera increases dramatically. If the creatures cannot split, they eventually swell to the point where the gas inside their bodies literally tears them apart.

Because of the location of Cularin, and because of the lack of attention to the cochlera, more specifics of the reproductive capacities of the creatures are not available. They are indeed a beautiful addition to the cloudscape of Genarius, and they remain a mystery.

Notes for the Gamemaster

The reason the cochlera have not been further studied is that certain powerful groups are suppressing efforts to do so. Disinformation has been spread - - including rumors about toxins the creatures secrete when approached by living creatures, their tendency to use their pseudopods to ionize the engines of nearby starships, and so on - - in order to keep interest and research at a minimum.

In reality, the cochlera are peaceful and docile, more than content to stay away from everything that might do them harm. They are quite adept at noticing changes in the flow of gas currents around them, and if something overly large is displacing the gases, cochlera generally head for another region of the planet. They lack the natural defenses to do much about predators, but fortunately, no natural predators exist on Genarius.

Recently, though, cochlera have become the object of a number of hunts. If a cochlera is captured alive, the fluids in its body sac can be drained off and filtered to extract a pale white ichor. This ichor, when ingested, grants limited immunity to some Force-related abilities. Those who possess this knowledge have worked hard to keep it from public awareness. A few rumors still exist, but only a handful of individuals have access to the knowledge and equipment necessary to treat the creatures in the undoubtedly painful extraction of their fluids.

Most often, the ichor is placed in a gel capsule to be taken orally. The flavor is beyond repulsive, and anyone attempting to swallow a capsule containing the ichor must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or vomit painfully for 1d6+1 rounds, or until a successful Treat Injury, Heal Self, or Heal Another check (DC 15) is made. (Note that because of the discomfort experienced, Heal Self checks are made with a - 5 penalty.) Those who fail the Fortitude save gain no benefits from the capsule. Those who succeed, however, are immune to both versions of the Force skill Affect Mind for 1d4+1 minutes. During this time, the affected person also is unable to use the skill. No other Force abilities or skills (including the closely related Illusion skill) are affected by taking the capsule.

Cochlera: Large airborne herd animal 2; Init +4 (+2 Dex, +2 species); Defense 15 (+2 Dex, +4 natural, - 1 size), touch 11, flat-footed 13; Spd fly 24 m (good); VP/WP 9/19; Atk +4 melee (1d4+4 physical or 3d8 ionization, 6 slam attacks) or +2 ranged; SQ Species traits; SV Fort +7, Ref +2, Will +2; Face/Reach 4 m by 4 m/12 m; FP 0; DSP 0; Rep +0; Str 19, Dex 14, Con 19, Int 1, Wis 15, Cha 4. Challenge Code B.

Skills: Hide +10, Spot +9, Survival +3.

Cochlera Species Traits

Ionization - Cochlera will attempt to defend themselves against intruders by lashing out with their six pseudopods. When they come in contact with a powered object, their pseudopods discharge with an effect equivalent to an ion rifle. Multiple pseudopods hitting the same object in the same round should be treated as though they were fire-linked weapons for the purposes of bypassing shields and dealing damage to the object's electrical systems.

Camouflage - As creatures native to the gas clouds, cochlera can blend into the swirling colors if danger is sensed. This grants them a +3 species

bonus on Hide checks.

Current sense - Cochlera can sense changes in the gas currents around them, granting them the blindsight ability (as described in Creatures in Chapter 14 of the Star Wars Roleplaying Game revised core rulebook). For every cochlera in a mull, increase the bonus on Spot checks to notice any approaching object (creature or craft) by +1. Thus, while a single cochlera might have only +9 to its Spot check to notice an approaching threat, a mull of 30 would have +38 (+9 base, plus 29 for each cochlera beyond the first present) to notice a change in currents that might signal a threat to their lives.

Energy vulnerability (stun) - A cochlera's body requires that it be able to move and act in order to continue functioning. As such, stun effects can be devastating to these creatures. Add 8 to any DC for a cochlera to resist a stun effect, and a cochlera that fails its save against a stun effect must immediately make a second save at the same DC or explode violently.